DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 187 CE 078 078

TITLE	Disability & Literacy. How Disability Issues Are Addressed in Adult Basic Education Programs. Findings of a National Focus Group.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. for Literacy, Washington, DC.; President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Washington, DC.; Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.; National Association of State Directors of Adult Education.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	31p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accessibility (for Disabled); *Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Agency Cooperation; Agency Role; Coordination; *Disabilities; *Disability Identification; *Literacy Education; Normalization (Disabilities); *Special Needs Students; State Programs; Statewide Planning

ABSTRACT

A national focus group with 25 participants explored the current state of services for persons with disabilities in adult basic education (ABE) and how the ABE and disability communities could work together to create better service models. It found many states are doing little in this area. Six key findings were as follows: state ABE programs are increasingly aware that a large subset of the population they serve have disabilities that can affect how literacy skills are gained; many states and service programs do not feel their programs have the capacity to provide for needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and avoid the issue; state agencies do not clearly understand each others' responsibilities and roles in meeting needs of PWDs in their literacy programs; training for state and local administrators and service providers on the laws and instructional interventions related to disabilities is inadequate; meeting needs of persons with learning disabilities is perceived to be more problematic than meeting access needs of persons with physical disabilities; and the current level of disability services in adult literacy programs varies greatly by state. Five steps toward solutions were offered: gain a real picture of what is happening in all states; create ongoing working groups at the state and national levels focused on these issues; develop partnerships to expand resources available for literacy services; work towards developing a means to better identify disabilities; and provide input into state and federal legislation. (Appendixes include a list of participants, federal policy statement, state initiatives, and participant comments.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 427 187

Disability & Literacy

How Disability Issues are Addressed in Adult Basic Education Programs

Findings of a National Focus Group

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Sponsored by:

National Institute for Literacy

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

Office of Adult and Vocational Education, U.S. Department of Education

National Association of State Directors of Adult Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DISABILITY & LITERACY

How Disability Issues are Addressed in Adult Basic Education Programs

FINDINGS OF A NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP

SPONSORED BY:

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

OFFICE OF ADULT AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF ADULT EDUCATION

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....1

Introduction.....5

Key Findings.....8

Visioning.....11

Action Steps.....12

Conclusion.....14

Recommendations.....16

Addendum's

I. Attendees.....17

II. U.S. Department of Education's June 13, 1991 Policy Statement.....19

III. Examples of Current State Initiatives.....20

IV. Selected Comments.....22

The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal organization that is leading the national effort towards a fully literate America. By building and strengthening national, regional, and state literacy infrastructures, the Institute fosters collaboration and innovation. Our goal is to ensure that all Americans with literacy needs receive the high-quality education and basic skills services necessary to achieving success in the workplace, family, and community.

800 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006 202/632-1500
www.nifl.gov

Executive Summary

On March 26, 1997, a national focus group looked at the current state of services for persons with disabilities in adult basic education (ABE) programs. In addition, the focus group explored how the ABE and disability communities could work together to create better service models. The meeting was co-sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy, the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Office of Adult and Vocational Education/U.S. Department of Education, and the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education.

The federal partners brought together six State Directors of Adult Education, and the directors of Governors' Committees on People with Disabilities from the same six states, as well as others with expertise in either literacy or disability services. Meeting participants sought to gain a clear picture of what is happening now, what needs to happen in the future, and how to make it happen.

Need

The need for the meeting is highlighted by the findings in the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which found that adults with disabilities generally have low literacy skills. The NALS showed a far higher percentage of adults with all types of disabilities operating at Level 1 (the lowest of five proficiency levels) than the general population. While the 21 percent of the general population functions at Level 1 in the "prose" literacy scale, for persons with disabilities, the findings are shown in the following chart.

PERCENTAGE OF DISABLED ADULTS WITH SIGNIFICANT LITERACY NEEDS

Type of Disability	Adults at Level 1 *(in percentage)*
Mental retardation	87
Learning disability	58
Visual difficulty	54
Speech disability	53
Any mental or emotional condition	48
Physical, mental or other handicapping condition	46
Physical disability	44
Long term illness	41
Other health impairments	39
Hearing difficulty	36

As persons with disabilities become aware that their skills do not meet the requirements of the workplace, they may turn to adult basic education programs for support. Often, they find these programs unprepared to serve persons with disabilities. In addition, a significant percentage of persons seeking literacy services are likely to be unaware of their disabilities. Many of these adults either left the K-12 system before the advent of extensive special educational services or were not identified during their school years.

Prominent among under-identified disabilities are learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit disorders (ADD). The U.S. Department of Labor, in the 1991 report The Learning Disabled in Employment and Training Programs, cited reports estimating that 50-80 percent of persons in adult basic education programs may have one of these disabilities.

Field reports indicate that many adult literacy providers are struggling to determine how to address the needs of adults with disabilities. Reports also show an apparent lack of understanding on the part of service providers of what is meant by "reasonable accommodations." For example, very few persons with disabilities were provided accommodations when taking tests such as the GED.

Key Findings

The general sense of the group was that, while some states are making major commitments to address the needs of persons with disabilities in literacy programs, many states were doing little in this area. The discussion brought out six key points:

1. State ABE programs are increasingly aware that a large subset of the population they serve have one or more disabilities, and that these disabilities can affect how literacy skills are gained.

2. -There is concern on the part of many states and service programs about persons with disabilities and their particular needs. Many do not feel that their programs have the capacity to provide for those needs and, therefore, avoid the issue.

3. Different state agencies (e.g. adult education, employment and training, vocational rehabilitation, disability employment organizations, etc.) do not clearly understand each others' roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in their literacy programs.

4. Training for state and local administrators and service providers on the laws and instructional interventions related to persons with disabilities is inadequate. Therefore, there is very limited understanding by the

ABE programs, state agencies, and persons with disabilities concerning how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights laws affect ABE service models.

5. Meeting the needs of persons with learning disabilities (LD) is perceived to be more problematic than addressing the access needs of persons with physical disabilities.

6. The current level of services for persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs varies greatly from state to state.

Solutions Given current policy and resource restraints, the group offered five steps toward solutions, as follows:

1. Gain a real picture of what is happening in all the states.

2. Create an on-going working group on both the state and national level focused on these issues.

3. Develop partnerships that could lead to expanding the resources available for literacy services.

4. Work towards developing a means for better identifying disabilities, (e.g. diagnostic issues for LD, vision, and hearing impairments).

5. Provide input into current and future state and federal legislation, work to ensure that funding is increased and that these issues are included in public policy decisions.

A primary conclusion of the group is that while there appears to be a growing understanding of the important linkages between adult literacy and disabilities issues, there is not yet consensus on what can or should be done. Much of this lack of agreement may simply be a lack of experience and knowledge. Linking disability and literacy issues is a relatively new approach, and the knowledge of what to do is limited. In part, this lack of knowledge is a result of the lack of communication between disabilities groups and state literacy providers.

The group felt that the key element needed to bring about consensus and change is unequivocal commitment and leadership on the part of most states to address this issue. Until that clear leadership develops in each state, the systems will continue to struggle with meeting the needs of adults with disabilities in state-funded literacy programs. While the focus group

discussed a wide range of issues and approaches, they agreed upon three main recommendations, as shown by the following chart.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish working groups.** Each state should establish an internal working group to develop ways and means of addressing the needs for persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs.

2. **Improve communication.** A process should be established through the State Directors of Adult Education for communicating across states about various state efforts, including the development of model projects.

3. **Seek legislative remedies.** State Directors, the Governor's Committee, and federal partners should work toward addressing this issue through legislative means, seeking mandates and resources to build in disability components into literacy efforts. The group also saw the need for the federal partners to support the process.

Introduction

On March 26, 1997 a national focus group looked at the current state of services for persons with disabilities in adult basic education (ABE) programs. In addition, the focus group was designed to look at how both the ABE and disabilities communities could work together to create better service models. The meeting was co-sponsored by the following organizations:

- National Institute for Literacy
- The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
- The Office of Adult and Vocational Education/U.S. Department of Education
- The National Association of State Directors of Adult Education

The federal partners brought together six State Directors of Adult Education, and the directors of Governors' Committees on People with Disabilities from the same six states. This meeting was the first time representatives of these groups had met to discuss issues of literacy, employment, and skill development of persons with disabilities.

In addition, several Federal agencies and related programs were represented at the meeting. These included the following:

- The Administration on Developmental Disabilities/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)/U.S. Department of Education
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Experts in key areas of adult literacy also attended, including specialists in adult education, a representative from the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, a staff development specialist from West Virginia, and a specialist in English as a Second Language (ESL) and disabilities. (See Addendum I for a full listing of meeting participants.)

The meeting was convened as a focus group, rather than as a "summit" so there was no pressure on participants to develop consensus. The ground rules were designed to elicit the fullest range of opinion from all participants. Meeting participants sought to gain a clearer picture of what is happening now, what needs to happen in the future, and how what is involved in making it happen.

Background

According to the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), adults with disabilities generally have low rates of literacy skills. The NALS showed a far higher percentage of adults with all types of disabilities operating at Level 1 (the lowest of five proficiency levels) than the general population. In the case of most types of disability, the difference was two to four times the general rate. The NALS found that 21 percent of the total population functioned at Level 1, as compared to the following rates for specific disabilities:

PERCENTAGE OF DISABLED ADULTS WITH SIGNIFICANT LITERACY NEEDS

Type of Disability	Adults at Level 1 *(in percentage)*
Mental retardation	87
Learning disability	58
Visual difficulty	54
Speech disability	53
Any mental or emotional condition	48
Physical, mental or other handicapping condition	46
Physical disability	44
Long term illness	41
Other health impairments	39
Hearing difficulty	36

Further research on NALS data has found a highly disproportionate representation of persons with disabilities in the subgroups of Level 1. For example, even though only 3 percent of the overall population self-reported a learning disability, 19 percent of all those under age 25 in Level 1 report having learning disabilities. This age unbalance in self-reporting is related when adults went through school. If they are over 30-35 years old, they went through school prior to the implementation of "special education" laws and, therefore, are far less likely to be aware of their learning disability and, therefore, far less likely to self-report. By looking at the group that went through school after special education was established, a more realistic picture of the rate of LD is represented in the self-reporting process.

As the movement for independent living for persons with disabilities grows, the need for better and more competitive literacy skills also increases. And while there is every indication that employers are much

more willing to hire people with disabilities, they still require employees who can do the following:

- Read
- Perform basic math skills
- Interact well with co-workers

As persons with disabilities become aware that their skills do not meet the requirements of the workplace, they may turn to adult basic education programs for support. When they do, they often find these programs unprepared to serve persons with disabilities. In addition, significant percentage of persons seeking literacy services are likely to be unaware of their own disabilities. Many of these adults either left the K-12 system before the advent of extensive special educational services or were not identified during their school years.

Issues

Field reports indicate that many adult literacy providers are struggling to meet the needs of adults with disabilities who are seeking their services. The issues they face include:

- How to make buildings accessible (especially in rural settings, where there are few options available for services, and in older urban centers, where facilities may not meet current accessibility standards).
- What are the best approaches for providing literacy training to persons with various disabilities?
- What are other community resources that could be available for services technical assistance?
- Lack of understanding on the part of service providers of what is meant by "reasonable accommodations." For example, very few persons with disabilities were provided accommodations when taking the GED.

In 1995, as a result of a national summit on LD sponsored by the National Center on Learning Disabilities, a federal interdepartmental working group on LD was formed. Included in this group were the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD), the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (ED/DAEL), the Domestic Policy Office of the White House, and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The interdepartmental group called for several initiatives, including a joint effort of the three entities listed above to examine how literacy services are affected by disabilities issues. This national focus group meeting was the first major step in gathering information from the field.

Key Findings

The issue of how to serve persons with disabilities in adult basic education programs is not new. William R. Langner, President of the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs (NAASLN) and former program specialist at the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), provided a brief overview of the federal response to the needs of persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs. This included an overview of the following legislation that has bearing on adult disability and literacy issues:

- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Sections 504 and 508)
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA.).

The National Literacy Act of 1991 addressed broader adult literacy issues. An overview of specific efforts of the federal government towards persons with disabilities in the area of literacy and employment included the following:

- The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD) and its funding of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN).
- The President's Committee on Mental Retardation (PCMR) and its support of the movement towards independent living for people with disabilities.
- The National Council on Disabilities (NCD) and its role in policymaking and as liaison with the White House.
- The adult literacy initiatives of Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.

Events Important events include the following:

1980	Creation of the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) in the U.S. Department of Education, which began initiatives to improve programs for adults with disabilities. Changes included the development of accommodation procedures for the GED exam.
1991	Issuance of the "Coordination Policy Statement of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education and the Office of Special

	Education and Rehabilitative Services." (See Addendum II.)
1991	Creation of the National Institute for Literacy
1993	Decision by the National Institute for Literacy to fund a National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center
1994	Decision by the National Institute on Disabilities Research and Rehabilitation (NIDRR) to fund the National Center on Training and Development for Adults with Learning Disabilities at the University of Georgia
1995	Decision by NIDRR to fund the University of Kansas to develop recommendations on accommodations for persons with learning disabilities

Adult education professional development has run parallel with federal efforts. This process has included the "First National Congress for Adults with Special Learning Needs," which was held at Galludet University in 1987. It also includes the establishment of a professional group, the National Association for Adults with Special Learning Needs (NAASLN), and its focus on lifelong learning for persons with disabilities, in 1988.

Models

A discussion of existing models (See Addendum III) and the current status for adults with disabilities in literacy programs brought the group to general consensus that while some states are making major commitments to addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in literacy programs, many states are doing little in this area. Six key points follow:

1. There is a growing awareness on the part of state ABE programs that a large subset of the population being served by these programs has one or more disabilities and these disabilities can impact how literacy skills are gained.

2. There is fear on the part of many states and service programs about persons with disabilities and their particular needs. Many do not feel

that their programs have the capacity to provide for those needs and, therefore, avoid the issue.

3. There is no clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different state agencies in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in their literacy programs.

4. There is a lack of training for state and local administrators and service providers on both the laws and the instructional interventions that relate to persons with disabilities. This has led to very limited understanding by ABE programs, state agencies, and persons with disabilities about how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights laws affect service models for ABE.

5. Meeting the needs of persons with learning disabilities (LD) is perceived to be more problematic than addressing the access needs of persons with physical disabilities.

6. The level of current services for persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs vary greatly from state to state.

Visioning

The group developed the following vision:

- Programs and services should be inclusive -- able to fully incorporate the needs of persons with disabilities into general service models. Programs deliver services that are comprehensive and individualized.
- Comprehensive training on meeting the needs of all persons, including persons with disabilities, should be provided to all staff.
- There should be a real, open commitment from leadership to make programs accessible to all persons with disabilities.
- A major public awareness campaign would be developed. It would focus on the relationship between literacy and disabilities and help persons with disabilities understand the connection between literacy and self-sufficiency.
- State and local public, non-profit, and private systems should work together in a comprehensive and coordinated way toward meeting the need of persons with disabilities.
- Services to identify disabilities should be readily available, and payment/costs should not be a barrier to gaining diagnostics.
- The focus should be not just on "teaching" but on using "accommodations" as a means of helping people become functional.

Broad Dreams

- Literacy and adult education should be recognized as basic human rights.
- A person in every one-stop center will really know disability issues and how to get services for persons with disabilities.
- Services for persons with disabilities will start at birth and continue throughout a lifetime.
- "Special education" would be eliminated and our education system would recognize the individual needs of each person.
- Each individual would have a chance to work at a job that uses his/her skills.
- No stigma, shame, or paternalism would be associated with having a disability.

Action Steps

When the discussion focused on looking at realistic solutions, given current policy and resource restraints, solutions offered fell into five areas.

1. Gain a real picture of what is happening in all the states.

- Conduct a phone and mail survey to ascertain current state efforts.
- Work with the National Institute's for Literacy's HUBS to request such information. (The HUBS are part of LINCS, an Internet-based information and communication system that links together adult literacy programs throughout the nation.)
- Use the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center's information and resources to ascertain state activities. National ALLD Center is a NIFL funded project with the goal of providing information and technical assistance in the area of adults with learning disabilities.

2. Create on-going working groups at both the state and national levels focused on this issue. Such actions might include:

- Establish a policy group within the structure of the State Directors of Adult Education.
- Form interagency groups within states.
- Develop interagency commitments for cost sharing related to the provision of accommodations.

3. Create means for expanding resources available for meeting goals.

- Adjust user fees (such as the cost of taking the GED) to include the overall costs of providing accommodations (i.e. spreading the costs across the board).
- Establish a centralized pool of funds for providing accommodations.
- Consider ways of using EPSDT (Early Periodic Screening Diagnostic and Treatment) funds for literacy services and accommodations.
- Work with the reauthorization of federal legislation, such as, IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Adult Education Act to ensure coordinated service requirements and dedicated resources for adults with disabilities.

4. Work towards developing a means for better identifying disabilities (e.g. diagnostic issues for LD, vision and hearing impairments.)

- Train psychologists from the K-12 system in issues of literacy, and testing for disabilities in adults.

- Use graduate schools as sources for diagnosticians for LD testing.
- Train and certify adult literacy teachers to administer screenings and tests.
- Develop community college courses on LD that include diagnostics for course takers.
- Use the new tool kit of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center as a basis for development of screening and referral programs.

5. Provide input into current and future state and federal legislation.

- Create better language on transition in IDEA to include adult literacy programs.
- Expand the age limit for IDEA coverage.
- Include specific language in the Adult Education Act for services to people with disabilities.
- Develop support and funding for replication of state models that are addressing inclusion of people with disabilities in welfare reform plans (e.g. Washington State and Kansas).
- Use the reauthorization process for the Vocational Rehabilitation Act to identify connections and linkages.
- Look at ways to include support for persons with disabilities in the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act reauthorization.

Conclusion

While there seems to be a growing understanding of the linkages between adult literacy and disabilities issues, there is not a clear understanding or consensus about what can or should be done. Much of this lack of agreement may simply be a lack of "history" (e.g. the linkage of disability and literacy is a relatively new approach and the knowledge of what to do is limited). This lack of knowledge is partially a result of the lack of communication between disabilities groups and state literacy providers.

This lack of communication has it roots in several areas, including: the lack of:

1. Resources and staff support for disabilities issues on the state level.

2. Emphasis in the past on literacy issues by disabilities groups.

3. Understanding on both state literacy groups and disabilities groups as to the extent and impact of such disabilities as learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder on the populations served by state literacy programs.

4. Information on issues such as teaching techniques and accommodation approaches for persons with disabilities within the adult literacy community.

5. Resources available for teacher training, diagnosticians, and provision of accommodations within the state literacy programs.

6. Leadership on this issue from a federal or state level.

Changes are currently taking place in several of these areas, as shown by the following"

- The emphasis on independent living and work has greatly increased the understanding of the need for literacy in the disability community.

- Thanks to the efforts of several organizations, including the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, there is a far greater awareness of the rates of LD, ADHD, and other disabilities in the adult literacy population.

- Several states have taken major steps towards developing and implementing training programs on disabilities for teachers, including

teaching techniques and accommodations. There is now far more established training programs designed to meet the needs of adults with disabilities in the market place than any previous time.

- With the increases in federal support for adult literacy there is now additional funds available for training.

- There is growing leadership on a federal level to address the issue.

The key element that is not in place is clear leadership and commitment on the part of most states to address the issue. Until that clear leadership develops in each state, the systems will continue to struggle in meeting the needs of adults with disabilities in state funded literacy programs. This can result in the following:

- States programs not reaching their goals for adult education

- Teachers feeling frustration for not having appropriate teaching techniques for students with disabilities.

- The adult learner with disabilities not succeeding and taking on more sense of failure.

- Fewer people who are successful in the new economy, and more continuing to be dependent on public sector support.

Recommendations

While the focus group looked at a wide range of issues and approaches, it developed the following three main recommendations:

1. Each state needs to establish an internal working group to develop ways and means of addressing the needs for persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs. These working groups need to include a wide representation of disabilities interests, from both public and private organizations. Working groups need to look at key issues, including identification, accommodations and teacher training.

2. A process should be established through the State Directors of Adult Education for communicating across states about various state efforts, including the development of model projects.

3. State Directors, the Governor's Committee, and federal partners should work toward addressing this issue through legislative means. A national working group should be established to help set priorities, as well as a process for moving these priorities into legislation.

There is also a need for the federal partners to support the process. The holding of the focus group is a major step forward in this process. The issuing of this report is another. Working with the State Directors' Association towards implementation of the recommendations should be the next step.

ADDENDUM I

Focus Group on Literacy and Disabilities
March 26, 1997

ATTENDEES:

Federal Partners

Andy Hartman
Director
National Institute for Literacy

Dina Dorich
Director of Public Affairs
President's Committee on Employment
of People With Disabilities

Ron Pugsley
Director
Division of Adult Education and Literacy
Office of Adult and Vocational Education
U.S. Department of Education

Representatives of Governors' Committees
on Employment of People with Disabilities:

Arizona
Jim Bruzewski

Kansas
Martha Gabehart

Massachusetts
Jason Albert

North Carolina
Tarrant Burnette

Pennsylvania
Carl Marshall

Washington
Toby Olson

State Directors of Adult Education:

Arizona
Gary Eyre

Kansas
Janet Stotts

Massachusetts
Bob Bickerton

North Carolina
Randy Whitfield

Pennsylvania
Cheryl Keenan

Washington
Israel Mendoza

Other Federal Participants:

Bob Williams
Commissioner
Administration on Developmental Disabilities
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Andrew Imparato
Equal Employment Opportunities Commission

Helen Thornton
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education

Zanne Tillman
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education

Other Non-Federal Participants:

Linda Andersen
State of West Virginia
Office of Adult Education

Mary Ann Corley
National Adult Literacy
and Learning Disabilities
Center

Bill Langner
National Association of
Adults with Special Learning Needs

Sharon J. Confessore
The George Washington
University

Robin Schwartz
American University
(ESL/LD specialist)

Michael Tate
State of Washington

Meeting Facilitators:

Dale Brown
President's Committee on
Employment of People with Disabilities.

Glenn Young
National Institute for Literacy

Recorder:

Maggie Roffee
President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

ADDENDUM II: FEDERAL POLICY STATEMENT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

JUN 13 1991

COORDINATION POLICY STATEMENT
of the
OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION
and the
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

- Whereas, of the 43 million Americans with disabilities, 40% have not completed high school and 66% are not in the labor force, and;
- Whereas, Federal and State agencies delivering services to adults and youth with disabilities have engaged in minimal coordination and collaboration resulting in duplicative programs and gaps in service to this at-risk population, and;
- Whereas, one of the barriers to integrating persons with disabilities into the work force is their lack of basic education and job skills, and;
- Whereas, a national goal on "Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning" has been adopted as part of the national education reform effort, and;
- Whereas, the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted on July 26, 1990.

Therefore, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) hereby establish a coordination policy to help adults and youth with disabilities obtain lifelong learning opportunities that facilitate independent living, employment, personal growth and fulfillment. In order to implement this policy OVAE and OSERS will:

1. Review relevant legislation administered by OVAE and OSERS and determine where coordination efforts can be enhanced;
2. Review relevant administrative rules and regulations and determine where changes should be made to strengthen coordination of educational services for adults and youth with disabilities;
3. Review relevant Memoranda of Understandings in each office which concern adults and youth with disabilities and determine if they should be continued, dropped, or revised;

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

4. Encourage States to develop inter-agency agreements to improve the coordination of services for adults and youth with disabilities;

5. Review all dissemination approaches including relevant clearinghouses in order to determine how they might be combined into a single coordinated dissemination system for adult, vocational and special education and rehabilitative services;

6. Develop a coordinated research and development effort to focus on "school-to-work" transition needs of adults and youth with disabilities;

7. Develop coordinated, learner-centered approaches to improving programs for adults and youth with disabilities.

Betsy Brand
Assistant Secretary for
Vocational and Adult Education

Robert R. Davila
Assistant Secretary for
Special Education and
Rehabilitative Services

ADDENDUM III

Current State Initiatives:

The group also discussed the efforts currently underway in states involved in the meeting:

Washington

The state is leveraging funding sources such as Carl Perkins and state dollars to begin to address the issue of disability in state literacy programs.

Washington also used AmeriCorps to develop a demonstration project involving teachers and tutors in including accommodations in direct instruction. Several of the AmeriCorps staff were persons with disabilities. The demonstration project helped all involved learn about fears and misconceptions concerning the costs of accommodations, lawsuits, and dealing with someone who is "different."

Washington State welfare programs has been conducting a model project to identify persons with disabilities in welfare programs. The project has developed a screening protocol, diagnostic criteria, and intervention programs. It has found 35 percent of the welfare clients with learning disabilities and 5 percent have mental retardation. The newly identified persons are receiving literacy training designed for adults with disabilities and getting accommodations in taking standardized tests, such as the GED.

Kansas

Two universities (Kansas and Kansas State) are developing a notebook on accommodations. Kansas has a Governor's task force on adults with learning disabilities that has produced brochures for employers. The task force has reached a common definition for LD and criteria for services; and addressed how their definitions differ from various laws. The task force found that the "process" is more important than the "product" and is encouraging other states to work through a similar process for the purpose of building state procedures.

Through a pilot project, Kansas found that 50 percent of welfare recipients tested has learning disabilities.

The Kansas state government will not fund any grantees that do not meet ADA access and accommodation standards.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts has model projects underway, including one looking at the use of accommodations for teens with LD as a major tool in gaining GEDs and literacy skills.

The state's programs appointed staff as coordinators for the provision of ADA services, and those staff receive an extra stipend to compensate for the extra assignment.

Massachusetts puts half a million dollars per year into training in methods for teaching persons with disabilities. They have found that the skills learned in the training are benefiting all students.

The state is putting together an accommodation fund for adults without other resources "who have fallen through the cracks." Since there are no entitlements for adult services, there are long waiting lists. They have very little capacity to do native language assessments, and they have also found that agencies with performance based contracts are referring people with disabilities back; they are also struggling with the issues of disclosure since they cannot ask about disabilities.

West Virginia

West Virginia has developed a statewide program in which all literacy providers will receive up to 48 hours of training in learning disabilities. The training sessions will be spread out over a two-year period. Funding for this comes from federal Adult Education 353 monies allocated to states for training and demonstration activities.

The training and support will be provided through the development of teams that include K-12, Special Ed, DVR & Testing specialist. The staff will receive training on identifying disabilities, teaching techniques, and accommodations approaches.

North Carolina

As a result of a lawsuit against the state, based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, North Carolina has develop a national model for services to adults with disabilities. Through the community college system education programs provide both teaching instruction and testing accommodations for those in both standard classes and those in adult basic education programs.

Because they have part-time, temporary staff there is no continuity. The state is still having problems in development of accommodations for people with visual and hearing impairments. They also find that instructors often use a person's learning disabilities to cover up "teaching disabilities"

ADDENDUM IV: Selected Comments

There is a growing awareness on the part of state ABE programs that a large subset of the population being served by these programs have one or more disabilities and these disabilities can impact how literacy skills are gained.

- Adults in general are leaving schools with less skills and people with disabilities in particular have to jump through more hoops. A lot of post secondary programs are reluctant to provide accommodations outside of physical structures (e.g. ramps, etc.), and there is resistance to providing auxiliary aids and services such as sign language interpreting. The question of "who will pay?" is still being raised.

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is finding that their consumers are testing low (on adult basic skills) and need remedial work before going on to college level courses or the trades

- Braille instruction, which is the key to literacy among blind youth, is fading. Also deaf and hard of hearing youth are being included more often in the general classroom. This is resulting in losing the benefits gained from having ASL (American Sign Language) trained instructors. At the same time the skills and competencies of the classroom teachers of deaf students are not being enhanced - and as a result the deaf community is losing skills and employment.

- As communication devices (designed for persons with disabilities) become more available there will be more inclusion of persons with severe disabilities into the class rooms and into work situations. However, too many people with severe communication barriers have little access to devices and consequently continue to have poor literacy skills;

- Among the ESL population, there is some awareness of LD, but they have no instructional materials in the first language (designed for the LD population).

- (In the future) more services for persons with disabilities will be needed. (The growth in need is due to) the disabilities developed by "drug babies", the fact that more individuals are surviving traumatic brain injuries, and there are (high rates of) disabilities among the immigrant populations.

There is "fear and denial" on the part of many states and service programs about persons with disabilities and their particular needs. Many do not feel that their programs have the capacity to provide for those needs, and therefore avoid the issue.

- Teachers and tutors believe their programs must change drastically to teach people with disabilities. This leads many educators to think that persons with disabilities should go to separate special programs. Therefore, programs are looking for ways

to send the person with disabilities somewhere else, instead of trying to find ways of incorporation (into their programs).

- Many states fear potential law suits (for non-compliance with disability laws). This fear maybe the major contributing factor in states looking at addressing the disability issues.

- Adult education programs fear that people with disabilities will lower their statistics of success. The assumption is that persons with disabilities will have lower levels of achievement and higher levels of dropout rates.

There is no clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different state agencies in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities in their literacy programs.

- Many programs and agencies operate in a "band-aid mode" with a "sigh of relief" mode. In other words, the goal of the programs is to not provide good service, but to figure out how to pass responsibility (for persons with disabilities) on to someone else.

- While (the public) educational system is grounded in the philosophy of individual education from K through 12, this (concept of individualized education) does not spills over to Adult Education.

- More interconnections is needed within the states (e.g. many of the people from same states in this meeting have only met, for the first time, as a result of this meeting. - out of their state, in Washington DC.)

- State services are very fragmented and a major barrier is communications.

- While many believe that staff training is the key to changing services, what is really needed is intensive work to change the existing system within the state. The need is to have the states really incorporate the issue (of disability) into their planning from the state and with people having responsibility towards assurance of quality service.

There is a lack of training for state and local administrators and service providers on both the laws and the instructional interventions that relate to persons with disabilities. Therefore, there is very limited understanding by ABE programs, state agencies, and persons with disabilities about how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other civil rights laws affect service models for ABE.

- No one publicizes the right to or availability of accommodations.

- One primary barrier to access is identification. Most people get into programs without screening or testing resulting in the disability not being identified. Since the disability is not recognized, the person is provided with traditional training without access to accommodation. In many cases, the person will fail. The result will be that both the program and the person will see the fault with the person not the program, adding to the on-going sense of failure of the person with disabilities.

- Instructions for part-time teachers and curriculum for training needs to include how to screen for learning styles and LD.

- There is a great need for training in the area of ESL and disability. Few tutors check to see if the ESL student also has a disability. Far fewer have the resources or training available to address the issue if discovered.

- What is needed is a paradigm shift of how we view disability away from the medical/charity approach to a civil rights paradigm with a resultant shift of whom provides services. Access to literacy services is a civil right, but it becomes a profound human rights issue as well.

- It is harder to get an accommodation for the GED than it is for the GRE.

- We have not solved the physical access issues, such as lack of transportation and housing; and to telecommunications.

- National policies and national leaders are not fully inclusive of people with disabilities (e.g. "Welfare Reform" - the Administration use phrases such as 'able bodied people should be working');

- Persons with disabilities still need to be qualified for jobs and school. When persons with disabilities do not have a strong background in literacy and strong literacy skills, they can not really compete well. Literacy skills is the key to making such laws as the ADA meaningful. The laws stay you can't discriminate. It is not a make-work or affirmative action issue - it is not a "hire the handicapped" law. Having literacy skills enables persons with disabilities to prove that not hiring us is "solely based on the disability" and not our lack of ability to do the work.

Meeting the needs of persons with Learning Disabilities (LD) is perceived to be more problematic than addressing the access needs of a person with physical disabilities.

- Many individuals with LD do not know that they have learning disabilities.

- ADA definition of disability includes those who have impediments in reading. The courts, however, are interpreting the definition of who has a reading disability

and who is someone who can't read for other reasons in a very narrow fashion. And, therefore, there have been some cases in which persons with learning disabilities were found not to be entitled to accommodations.

- There has been a strong backlash as seen in the courts and in the media; people with learning disabilities and other non-obvious disabilities are seen as the "wrong" people for civil rights protection. The backlash has fostered the idea that these people are "taking advantage of the ADA, and actually taking resources away from those that the ADA was intended to protect; people with "real disabilities." The problems and law suits associated with Boston University is an example of the new anti-LD atmosphere which is developing.

Services for persons with disabilities in adult literacy programs vary greatly from state to state.

- The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center has not found any state which has an individualized-based program designed for adults with disabilities who are seeking literacy support.

- Several states have been aggressively looking at this issue for years. Through training, pilot projects and other efforts, several states have developed successful identification, intervention and teacher training effort. Some of these states are Arkansas, Connecticut, Oregon and West Virginia. Oklahoma, New York, Massachusetts and North Carolina and others are in the process of developing more intensive approaches. Other states have done little or nothing in the area.

- Adult literacy programs are run by different systems in different states (e.g., community colleges, non-profits, etc.)

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1998 442-320

National Institute for Literacy
800 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-2712

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, $300

Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. Department of Education
Permit No. G-17

FIRST CLASS MAIL